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Chairman: Mr. Niculescu ..... (Romania)

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The meeting was called to order at 11.40 a.m.

Agenda item 95: Environment and sustainable development (*continued*) (A/C.2/55/L.11)

Draft resolution A/C.2/55/L.11: Enhancing complementarities among international instruments related to environment and sustainable development

1. **Mr. Maksimychev** (Russian Federation), introducing the draft resolution on behalf of the sponsors, said that it followed upon General Assembly resolutions 53/186 and 54/217 and that its chief aim was to favour synergy among the international instruments related to environment and sustainable development and to strengthen cooperation among the secretariats of the relevant instruments and organizations involved. He counted on the support of all the delegations associated with the text; his own delegation stood ready to engage in a constructive dialogue with all Member States.

2. He drew attention to a typographical error in footnote 3 to the text, which should read "A/55/357" instead of "A/55/57".

3. **Mr. Le Gargasson** (France) underscored the importance attached by the European Union to enhancing complementarities among international instruments related to environment and sustainable development, the subject of the draft resolution just introduced, and pointed out that the member States of the European Union had decided to sponsor the text.

Agenda item 99: Implementation of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006) (A/55/407)

4. **Mr. Langmore** (Director, Division for Social Policy and Development), introducing the relevant report of the Secretary-General (A/55/407), said that poverty was now the major moral issue before the international community, whereas 20 years earlier it had been the arms race and the survival of humanity, still a subject of concern but less urgent at the moment. One fifth of the world's population lived in extreme poverty and one seventh suffered from chronic malnutrition. Poverty brought with it not only hunger and insufficient income but also, among other things, political marginalization and a lack of access to education and health services. Half of humanity lived on less than two dollars a day at a time when the world had never known such wealth and when it possessed unprecedented technological capabilities.

5. Inequalities of income and wealth were steadily growing both within countries and among them. Unfortunately, the obstacles to social justice were so formidable that many were despairing and giving up the fight. Yet there were strategies, policies and programmes that were able to make a difference, and some of them were already in place. Thus, political will played a critical role. In its special session of June 2000, the General Assembly had taken crucial steps to reduce poverty by deciding, for the first time, to set itself the target of reducing the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by one half by the year 2015, a goal reaffirmed by the Millennium Summit. Most countries had taken measures to fight against poverty, particularly by creating conditions that would allow the poor to help themselves. The international agencies, especially the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, were now giving more attention to poverty reduction. Substantial progress had been made, in countries as different as China and Ireland, despite the considerable obstacles that remained. One should therefore not be defeatist.

6. At the twenty-fourth special session recently held in Geneva on social development, the General Assembly had defined many elements that were central to a global poverty eradication strategy. Among other things, it had set out about 40 initiatives intended to strengthen the ability of the poor to help themselves, create jobs, improve basic education, facilitate access to credit and microcredit and promote rural development; at the international level, for example, access to the international trade system had to be expanded, debt relief had to be granted, developing countries and countries in transition had to be given a greater part in economic decision-making and the resources allocated to social development had to be increased.

7. Perhaps a new institutional arrangement should be devised to further mobilize the struggle against poverty, focus the world community's attention on the problem and improve coordination of the activities of international organizations.

8. **Mr. Tomasi** (France) said that he was speaking on behalf of the European Union, the Central and Eastern European countries associated with the

European Union, the associated countries Cyprus, Malta and Turkey and, in addition, Iceland.

9. The struggle against poverty and inequality was a central priority of the European Union, which in fact was making an important contribution to advancing that goal through its development assistance policy. The European Union reaffirmed its support for the provisions and commitments of the Millennium Declaration regarding poverty elimination and the convening of the High-level International and Intergovernmental Event on Financing for Development.

10. The negative social and economic impact of the many conflicts, natural disasters and declining raw material prices in Africa must of course be underscored; but particular attention must also be paid to the inequalities, particularly with regard to income distribution, access to basic social services and productive resources, that were also at the root of the various forms of impoverishment. The European Union was particularly concerned at the impact of HIV/AIDS, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, and its effect on the spread of poverty. It therefore supported the proposal to convene a special session of the General Assembly on the subject.

11. Much remained to be done to achieve the objective, reaffirmed at the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly and in the Millennium Declaration, to reduce the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by one half by the year 2015. Greater advances had to be made in a number of fields, namely school attendance, habitat, the improvement of health indicators and access to basic social services, and in reducing the degradation of the natural resources on which the poor depended. The European Union recognized that the 20/20 initiative, as interpreted at the Oslo Conference in 1996 and the Hanoi Conference in 1998, could be effective in helping to ensure the widest possible access to basic social services. Applying such a concept, which presupposed the support of the international community, was primarily the responsibility of the beneficiary countries, which were the ones to determine the planning and allocation of resources.

12. The European Union maintained that all donor countries should intensify their efforts to achieve the objective of devoting 0.7 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) to official development assistance (ODA).

13. It stressed the importance of sustained and continued growth in combating poverty. Economic policies must aim to strengthen the productive capacities of the poor by promoting economic activities that created jobs and measures that gave the poor access to the means of production, to ensure equitable distribution of income, and to safeguard the environment.

14. While recognizing the great potential of globalization as a catalyst for the economic development of the poorest countries, the European Union feared that certain developing countries were not in a position to benefit fully from it. The private sector should become more heavily involved in the struggle to reduce poverty. It was necessary to increase foreign direct investment in the developing countries, especially the least developed. Trade liberalization and the opening of markets were also key factors in poverty eradication strategies. Moreover, it was necessary to help create a domestic and foreign environment favourable to the development of productive investment that could sustain strong economic growth. That was one of the reasons why the European Union attached such importance to good governance, in particular the wise management of public affairs, a respect for human rights and the rule of law, the democratization of institutions, transparency and the accountability for the management of public affairs, and the participation of citizens in taking the decisions that concerned them.

15. Debt repayment hampered the activities of the developing countries that were most vulnerable to poverty. The Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative was an essential element in the struggle against poverty and in the developing countries' attempts to achieve sustainable development. The speedy implementation of the Initiative would enable beneficiary countries not only to mobilize their resources to reduce poverty by allocating them to social sectors such as education and health but also to create the necessary conditions for a State governed by the rule of law and human development. The European Union called on countries which fulfilled the requisite conditions to take the measures needed to embark on that process. It also called on creditor countries which had not yet done so to participate in funding the expanded Initiative so as to spread the burden more

evenly. The Union would make sure that financial aid provided under the Initiative would not be to the detriment of other channels of official development assistance. It also believed that the struggle against poverty should be a primary objective of macroeconomic stabilization policies. It therefore welcomed the decisions by the Bretton Woods institutions to make that objective a central feature of their policies and programmes. It also supported the reforms under way in United Nations funds and programmes.

16. The European Union recognized that special attention should be given to the most vulnerable and those most affected by poverty, such as children, indigenous peoples, elderly or disabled people and refugees and displaced persons.

17. The United Nations Millennium Declaration contained a timely reminder of the importance of promoting sexual equality and the empowerment of women as an effective way of combating poverty, hunger and disease and promoting sustainable development. It was particularly important to give women access to the ownership of land, particularly through the provision of equal inheritance rights, and to ensure access to credit. The Union considered that the development of microcredit would be a good way of strengthening women's role in economic development.

18. By the same token, while the international community had, particularly at the high-level debate at the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, acknowledged the role of information technologies in development, the Union emphasized that women should be given equal access to such technologies with men.

19. Lastly, the European Union stressed the importance of effective participation by the people concerned, by their national and local representatives and by organizations of civil society in defining and implementing policies to combat poverty.

20. **Mr. Chowdhury** (Bangladesh) said that at the Millennium Summit world leaders had made the eradication of poverty one of their immediate priorities and reaffirmed their support for the aim of reducing extreme poverty by half by 2015. If, however, current trends were maintained, it would not be possible to attain that target. Although considerable efforts had been made since the World Summit for Social Development at both the national and international level, global poverty was on the increase, especially in South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America.

21. Poverty was a complex phenomenon which related not only to low income and consumption but also to low achievement in such areas as education, health and nutrition. The poor faced serious problems with regard to jobs, credit, access to safe drinking water and sanitation services. The least developed countries, in particular, were confronted with too many competing priorities. The "promise" of poverty eradication through stabilization and structural adjustment programmes had never materialized.

22. Faced with that disappointing situation, the international community had reaffirmed its political will to eradicate poverty — first, with some vigour, at the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly and then with greater strength at the Millennium Summit — and to move more swiftly towards achieving that aim. The Secretary-General's report had recommended several possible avenues of action, mostly focusing on the area of growth and macroeconomic issues. While growth was an important factor, it could never guarantee the eradication of poverty, which was a complex and multidimensional phenomenon, with numerous social ramifications that contributed to its continued increase. Three of the conclusions reached in the report, however, deserved particular attention. First, bilateral and multilateral efforts were needed to safeguard vulnerable populations, especially in cases of economic crisis, since gains achieved over a long period were in danger of being rolled back when a developing economy was in prolonged shock. Secondly, new trading opportunities created by improved market access to industrial countries should be complemented by operational programmes, technical assistance and development finance, so that the least developed countries, in particular, could make the best use of their preferential market access. Lastly, there was an urgent need to invest in the development of the human capital of the poor in order to help them lift themselves out of poverty, by ensuring that all children had the opportunity to go to school and by improving the quality of education.

23. A wealth of ideas had been generated by the major conferences of the 1990s and their review and appraisal processes, which had resulted in ambitious strategies needed for reducing poverty, but the moment

had come for concrete action to attain the agreed targets within the stipulated time.

24. **Mr. Valdivieso** (Colombia), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said that at the threshold of a new century mankind faced a profound and disheartening contradiction. While technological and scientific advances had brought about communication without frontiers, injustice and inequality had increased, thereby condemning half the inhabitants of the planet to surviving on US$ 1 or US$ 2 a day. Despite the innovations, therefore, the problems of poverty, hunger, marginalization and unemployment, and their negative impact, were causing increasing concern. The member countries of the Rio Group were a case in point: 41 per cent of the population of the region suffered from malnutrition, while unemployment and underemployment were serious problems, with 56 per cent of the population working in the informal sector.

25. In the United Nations Millennium Declaration, world leaders had clearly expressed their intention to spare no efforts to free men, women and children from the abject and inhuman conditions of extreme poverty. They had recommended the immediate implementation of the enhanced facility for relieving the debt of highly indebted poor countries and the provision of more generous development assistance. They had set the goal of reducing by half by 2015 the percentage of the world population with incomes of less than US$ 1 a day and the percentage of those suffering from hunger; of ensuring that children throughout the world could complete a full cycle of primary education; of reducing maternal mortality by three quarters; of halting the spread of HIV/AIDS; and of resolving by 2020 the housing problems of 100 million slum dwellers.

26. However, in view of the numerous handicaps suffered by the poor, such promises would be realized only if the principles of equality and solidarity between rich and poor nations were respected and the bonds of international cooperation were strengthened by means of adequate financial resources, a supportive international environment and the adoption of sensible domestic policies.

27. The Rio Group stressed the need to redress the balance of the emphasis placed on development, particularly its purely economic aspects. Development should be given a more human face by integrating it comprehensively with the exercise of political, social and cultural rights. For poverty had a multidimensional character which was not simply related to the lack of income but also encompassed such elements as quality of life, illiteracy, poor health, lack of access to basic services and productive goods, insecurity, lack of power and social exclusion. The Committee should therefore systematically consider every agenda item allocated to it from the perspective of the need to eradicate poverty. Nor should the environmental dimension be neglected, particularly with regard to natural disasters and the phenomenon of El Niño, which had inflicted such a devastating impact on the countries of Latin America; joint action and solidarity on the part of the international community were needed. The delegations of the Rio Group pledged to participate actively in measures taken to achieve tangible results in the quest to fulfil the supreme challenge facing the international community, which was to free its peoples from the shackles of poverty.

28. **Mr. Leiro** (Norway) said that it was unacceptable that 24 per cent of the world's population lived on less than $1 a day, but believed that the goal set at the Millennium Summit to reduce poverty to half by the year 2015 could be achieved with adequate development financing. Official development assistance had decreased from US$ 59 billion in 1994 to US$ 47.7 billion in 1997, illustrating the need for donor countries to increase their efforts to reach the goal of 0.7 per cent of GNP, as recommended by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

29. Most direct foreign investments in developing countries were made in middle-income countries. As only a small fraction of such investments benefited the poorest countries, it was necessary to establish a more development-friendly international framework and, in the developing countries, to adapt legal and institutional frameworks in order to promote domestic and foreign investment. It was also necessary to strengthen partnerships between public and private sectors with a view to the improved targeting of efforts to combat poverty. Equally, good governance at the national level should be encouraged.

30. Trade played an important part in that picture. Many developing countries lacked the capacity to utilize to their advantage the opportunities offered by global trade. Attention should also be devoted to achieving better overall resource utilization, in which context the poverty reduction strategy papers were welcome as the frameworks for sound economic

policies and for the improvement of such utilization, provided that the evolving capacity of partners was taken into account and that they were given time to involve domestic partners in their efforts.

31. It was clear that the HIV/AIDS pandemic was not only a health issue but also a development problem of disastrous proportions. Norway had therefore decided to double its funding of AIDS programmes through the United Nations system and to become more deeply involved in the challenges posed by AIDS in the fight against poverty.

32. In conclusion, he stressed that development assistance and development financing could do no more than supplement national efforts. The most important factor was the political will and determination of developing countries themselves to improve the situation of the poor. The war against poverty should be waged on every front, to which end the United Nations should devise a joint strategy that would meet the targets set at the Millennium Summit.

33. **Mr. Ben Mustapha** (Tunisia) said that striving for social progress and better living conditions for all peoples was an essential concern of the international community, enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and in most of the constitutional texts of United Nations bodies. That same theme was also the focus of the debates conducted at the major international conferences of the 1990s and at the General Assembly sessions which followed up implementation of the recommendations made at such conferences.

34. Given the dawn of the new millennium and the vast opportunities created by globalization as a result of rapid technological development and scientific progress, it was worrying to note that disturbing indicators were still being recorded. The Director-General of the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) had recently stressed that, for 820 million people, freedom from hunger remained a distant goal. The United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development had also stressed that 20 per cent of the global population still had no access to clean water and President Clinton had drawn a comparison between the 40 million annual deaths from hunger and the number of victims of the Second World War.

35. The international community should refuse to resign itself to that situation and should also reject a future in which a major portion of humanity was condemned to marginalization and exclusion. It should take rapid measures to save future generations from extreme poverty and the dangers which it entailed. With a view to responding to one of the major challenges to the universal conscience, Tunisia had appealed to the international community to establish a global solidarity fund which should help to reduce poverty and alleviate the effects of the hunger and destitution from which millions suffered. Intended to complement the efforts of the international community to combat poverty, the fund already enjoyed the support of various regional and international organizations, in particular the Organization of African Unity, the League of Arab States, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the South Summit of the Group of 77 and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. In accordance with the principle of human solidarity, the fund would accept donations from individuals, the private sector, associations, institutions and Governments and could already count on the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). It should be managed in accordance with the principles of transparency, efficiency and flexibility. Its activities would be determined on the basis of the priorities of the recipient countries and would assume active participation by civil society, with a view to ensuring that it targeted the most vulnerable groups and the most deprived regions, in particular the least developed countries. In order to guarantee that resources were allocated to the programmes established by the fund, it was proposed that it should rely on the administrative structures of UNDP, which had a well developed network of representation.

36. It augured well that the Millennium Summit had established solidarity as one of the fundamental values which should govern international relations in the twenty-first century. Tunisia welcomed the opportunity provided by the Summit to emphasize the urgent need for action to combat poverty. As the Secretary-General had said in his statement, history would judge the international community by the yardstick of what it had done to eradicate poverty.

37. **Ms. Morake** (Botswana), speaking on behalf of the members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), said that the report under consideration concluded that national and international efforts aimed at addressing poverty had borne mixed

results. Whereas life expectancy, access to basic social services and the average standard of living in developing countries had improved, a significant number of least developed countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, had made no progress in those areas. Africa was the poorest and least developed region in the world, where problems of technological backwardness, lack of foreign direct investment and the external debt burden persisted. Poverty reduction had also been affected by the ongoing conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola, while the recent floods in southern Africa had taken a toll on lives and caused immense damage to infrastructure. In addition, numerous countries in the region were faced with unsustainable debt stocks. SADC therefore reiterated its call for full debt cancellation in the case of highly indebted poor countries.

38. The report of the Secretary-General on implementation of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006) (A/55/407) drew a clear correlation between HIV/AIDS and the spread of poverty. For SADC, the fight against HIV/AIDS was therefore a priority. However, it needed the full support of the international community in providing additional financial resources for health care and education. SADC had participated in the five-year reviews of the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, and the World Summit for Social Development. Both events had revealed important linkages between globalization and poverty and produced comprehensive strategies for poverty eradication in which the roles of Governments, civil society and the private sector were clearly spelt out. The critical role of women in that effort had been recognized and SADC, for its part, had committed itself to the empowerment of women.

39. The eradication of poverty was a difficult process, which could not be addressed in isolation from the question of socio-economic development. It also required measurable and targeted efforts at both national and international levels. The SADC member countries had taken steps to pool efforts in various sectors, take advantage of economies of scale and enhance integration, for instance through regional trade and cooperation agreements. Such efforts should be complemented by practical measures to address the financing gap. It was therefore disheartening to note that official development assistance levels had declined, despite increasing needs. The participants in the Millennium Summit had expressed their resolve to address global poverty and it was through forums such as the forthcoming high-level intergovernmental event on financing for development and the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries that the General Assembly, in partnership with other development actors, should take concrete action with a view to poverty eradication.

40. **Mr. Taye** (Ethiopia) said that poverty remained one of the biggest challenges facing humanity at the beginning of the new millennium in an era of global economic prosperity and major advances in science and technology. Many developing countries, especially the least developed countries, were facing intractable problems in eradicating poverty, including the lack of financial resources, unfavourable terms of trade, and inadequate infrastructure and institutional capacity. The HIV/AIDS infection rate, which was higher in poor countries, was another challenge that aggravated poverty. It was also clear that the prospect of sharing the fruits of globalization was beyond reach for the least developed countries, the majority of which were in sub-Saharan Africa; those countries, which had remained outside the process of globalization, faced the risk of increased vulnerability owing to the weakness of their economies. Poverty manifested itself in different forms and involved a set of multisectoral issues that had to be addressed in a holistic fashion. Although national Governments had the primary responsibility, international support and the creation of an economic environment favourable to development were crucial factors in poverty eradication strategies. The developed countries should increase the levels of official development assistance (ODA), encourage the flow of foreign direct investment to the least developed countries, reduce the debt burden of those countries and open their own markets to goods and services from those countries.

41. The various United Nations funds and programmes had a pivotal role in the fight against poverty in view of their comparative advantages. They must intensify their efforts both individually and through their concerted action and programmes. National economic reform programmes and development strategies the overriding mission of which was poverty eradication — such as those adopted in Ethiopia, which had yielded encouraging results in ensuring both growth and sustainable development — needed sustained support from the international

community. A concerted international effort, supported by concrete action and programmes aimed at improving the national capacities of many developing countries through financial assistance and the transfer of relevant technologies, was essential to enable developing countries to combat poverty more effectively.

42. **Mr. Mohammed** (Nigeria), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that four years into the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, if one reviewed the progress that had been made it was clear that there was a need to intensify efforts in the fight against poverty. The various goals established by the action programmes drawn up by the United Nations, the World Bank and OECD were far from having been attained. Over one fifth of the world's population continued to live in extreme poverty, and the number of people living below the poverty line had increased in absolute figures, in Latin America, the Caribbean and South-East Asia, despite the better economic record of those regions in the 1990s. Africa presented a pathetic picture; virtually all economic and social indicators had declined, including life expectancy, the infant mortality rate, the illiteracy rate and per capita income, and the increasing incidence of the HIV/AIDS pandemic continued its devastating effects in the region. The lack of effective international action had made poverty the greatest threat to peace and security at the dawn of the new millennium. It was the single most pervasive violation of human and development rights.

43. The five-year review of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development had revealed that many developing countries faced intractable problems of poverty. The number of people living on less than $1 a day had increased in all developing regions. The major impediments to the eradication of poverty in developing countries included the lack of financial resources for development, worsening terms of trade, weak infrastructure and social services, a crushing debt burden, unemployment and increasing inequality in the distribution of income. Those problems, which had existed for many years, had been compounded by globalization, which had increased the vulnerability of developing countries.

44. The international community had to find ways to spread the benefits of globalization in trade, investment and information flows. The developed countries must fulfil the commitments made at all United Nations summit meetings and conferences of the past decades, including those relating to official development assistance; they should facilitate the flow of financial resources to developing countries, address the issue of external debt, reform the international financial system in order to reduce the impact of the volatility of capital flows, and widen the participation of the developing countries in decision-making by the international financial institutions. The forthcoming international conferences on the least developed countries and on financing for development, which would take place in 2001, would offer the international community the opportunity to redress the trend of increasing poverty, by adopting concrete measures that would assist the economic growth and enhance the social well-being of developing countries.

45. **Mr. Cabral** (World Food Programme) said that, despite the increase in global standards of living, one fifth of the world's population lived in conditions of extreme poverty, without access to safe water, adequate housing, health care or enough to eat; two thirds of the poor were women.

46. There was still much to be done to achieve the target set at the World Food Summit in Rome, namely to halve the number of chronically undernourished people by 2015. In the Millennium Summit Declaration, world leaders had renewed their commitment to achieving the target set at the World Summits in Rome and Copenhagen and halve the number of the poor by 2015. Hunger aggravated, and was aggravated by, social and political instability. Development that did not promote food security, especially for women and children, had weak foundations. Hunger was the first threshold to cross in order to eradicate poverty. The cost of halving the number of people suffering from malnutrition by 2015 was relatively low: $6 billion a year, according to FAO estimates, added to the current level of ODA. The cost of allowing hunger to persist was far greater than the cost of overcoming it. Improvements in health, nutrition, education and sanitation in the poorest countries would go a long way towards reducing poverty, yet donors were committing only around 10 per cent of their aid directly to those basic social services. Furthermore, the Governments of developing countries needed to reorient their own development policies in favour of the poorest.

47. For many countries, the solution of problems related to poverty and hunger depended to a large extent on political will. Too often civil war, natural

disasters or the breakdown of government structures resulted in the death of many people from reduced food security or famine. In 1999, the World Food Programme had assisted 29 million displaced persons who were victims of war and political conflicts; it had also assisted 31 million victims of natural disasters in the same year. The aim of WFP assistance in humanitarian operations was to save lives and to preserve the assets of the poor in ways that could accelerate the return to a normal life. Its development assistance, on the other hand, focused exclusively on the hungry and the poor, with 90 per cent of food aid directed to low-income countries. By ending hunger, a firm foundation could be laid for reducing poverty and promoting sustainable development.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.